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2-year-old deals with a rare disease

FLAT ROCK - After shooting a small, plastic basketball into her toy basketball hoop, Lindsay Ratcliffe celebrated by raising her hands in the air and yelling, "yes."

It's a typical reaction from a 2-year-old who loves basketball. But Lindsay is a unique girl. She was born with Hutchinson-Gilford Progeria Syndrome, known as progeria or HGPS. Many people may not know the disease because it's so rare: Only 40 to 45 cases are known worldwide.

"It's extremely rare. I think of the known cases, there's maybe 11 in the United States," said Lindsay's mother, Kristy Ratcliffe.

Progeria produces rapid aging, beginning at birth. It is often referred to as "little old man's disease" since physical symptoms include characteristics of an older person. Loss of hair, aged-looking skin and growth failure are some of the signs.

There's no cure and victims usually die of illnesses associated with old age by the time they're 13.

Since Lindsay was diagnosed with progeria, it has been difficult at times for Lindsay's parents, Joe and Kristy Ratcliffe of Flat Rock, to cope with such an uncommon disease.

"It's not passed down. It comes from a sporadic, mutating gene," Mrs. Ratcliffe said.

People have such a random chance of developing progeria - one in about 4 million to 8 million - that Mr. Ratcliffe feels helpless.

"We have no control," he said. "It's completely random."

Since Lindsay is too young to understand the road she faces, she is content to enjoy life like any other 2-year-old. If she's not watching her favorite cartoon, "The Backyardigans," on the Nick Jr. television network, she's practicing her jump shot. When she misses a shot from a makeshift free-throw line her dad made on the living room carpet, she smiles, covers her eyes and says "Aw, man."

Like many Detroit-area basketball fans, her favorite team is the Detroit Pistons. Mr. Ratcliffe says Lindsay loves to watch Pistons games on television. She even knows the Detroit announcer's famous line when the opposing team makes a turnover.

"Dee-troit basketball," she said, smiling.

Read more about Lindsay in today's Your Health on Page 8A.
